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**Submission Date:** February 7, 2016

## Biographical Question

1. *Does anything in your personal or professional background give you particular perspectives or skills that you can contribute to the School Committee?*

Though housed within the world of municipal government, the Lexington Public Schools is effectively a \$100 million nonprofit organization—one currently facing challenges related to governance and long-range planning. I hold a master's degree in Nonprofit Management from the New School for Social Research, with particular expertise in board development and strategic business planning. I will bring a planner's perspective to the big issues facing the district—space, student stress, budgeting— seeking to help move the district from “reactive mode” to a more proactive place. I have worked with over 30 organizations and their respective boards of directors to shore up the effectiveness of their governance structures, often as a precursor to long range planning, inclusive of multi-year financial projections. I understand key drivers of budgeting and the push and tug of thoughtful cost-benefit analyses that include both quantitative and qualitative considerations when addressing complex needs. I welcome the opportunity to contribute the full extent of my professional expertise to the work of the Lexington School Committee

Additionally, I currently have 4 children enrolled in the Lexington Public Schools ranging in age from 7-13. Next year our family will have representation in each level of the district. This gives me a real time perspective of how are schools are functioning and how our students are faring.

Lastly, as a first term Precinct 4 Town Meeting Member, I have a working understanding of how the management of our schools fits within the larger context of overall town management.

## Candidate Platform

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### 2. *Why are you running for School Committee?*

At the most elemental level, with 4 children enrolled in the system, my husband and I have a lot of skin in the game as far as the functioning of our schools are concerned. I also have an enduring and demonstrated commitment to civic service and believe that, given the benefit our family receives from our community's public education system, we have a duty to contribute—in my case, my time and expertise. I have a skill set that I believe can greatly benefit our district at this time—solid quantitative and qualitative research and analytical skills, process/meeting facilitation, a deep understanding of effective governance and long-range planning expertise.

### 3. *What are your top priorities for the Lexington school system?*

- Equipping our system with adequate space in order to meet the district's rising enrollment
- Facilitating community conversations—particularly cross-cultural discussions— related to defining “quality” and “achievement” for our district toward the ultimate aim of establishing curricular balance in our district
- Moving beyond discussion about the prevalence of student stress to actionable items that contribute to its reduction

## Policy Questions

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### 4. *What is the proper role of the School Committee in relationship to the Superintendent? What is the proper role of the School Committee in relation to school staff?*

Do a google search for roles and responsibilities of school board's/committees and superintendents and you will get 1,240,000 results. Clearly, we are not alone in having to grapple with this question. A quick perusal of the first 150,000, however, will yield that the lines are generally consistently and clearly drawn from community-to-community; state-to-state.

School Committees/Boards: set policy and organizational goals; adopt standards for conduct in public meetings; hire and evaluate Superintendents; ratify collective bargaining agreements; adopt budgets; oversee capital needs; adopt changes to educational programming; actively seek out community input regarding the health of the district.

Superintendents: Implement policies, plans and goals set by the committee; hire and evaluate administrative staff and faculty; prepare/recommend annual budgets; communicate school needs back to the board; recommend changes to program; set and implements program evaluation plans.

For each to successfully fulfill their roles, there must be a healthy interdependence between the two. However, at the end of the day: *“Only the superintendent can manage the day-to-day operations of the district, and only the board can identify the expectations for the district through its policies. Boards that micro-manage are working outside of their policy-making role. Superintendents who macro-manage are superseding the governance role of the board”* (<http://aasb.org/clear-board-and-superintendent-roles/>).

Ultimately the success of our district is not about the success of individuals (Superintendent or School Committee members), but about how they work together to advance the issues important to the system. There will always have to be negotiations around work style, but if we come from places of mutual respect there’s no reasons why such negotiations can’t be successful.

5. *Is the School Committee on the right track regarding school construction plans to address overcrowding? What changes, if any, would you like to see to the current elementary and middle school capacity plans?*

I think the current construction plan is a reasonable compromise for now. We have a plan with the standard modulars at Bridge, Bowman and Fiske, to alleviate some of the overcrowding they have experienced for years while we wait for a new Hastings to come on line. I think these are imperative and I have been advocating for them for the past 14 months. I support the preliminary plans for redistricting to ensure that we are, in fact, optimally using all of our available capacity. I support the additions at both Clarke and Diamond and am heartened that the split growth model is the one being pursued. It is my sincere hope that the town is successful in acquiring the Pelham Rd property as a critical and likely much needed place holder for future capacity building—be it as a 7<sup>th</sup> elementary school (with or without the LCP), as a free-standing LCP in its own right, or some other yet to be identified school-related program.

6. *Do you think that Lexington is ready to support a large capital debt exclusion override, and a large operating budget override to accommodate our larger enrollments? Have there been any school debt exclusions or overrides in the past that you did not support?*

I have only lived through one debt exclusion override vote—the 2009 Estabrook, Bridge, Bowman vote. I actively supported it at the time. I do have concerns that a lack of confidence in the health of our School Committee will undermine the ability of those advocating for the debt exclusion to be successful. I have heard as much on the Town Meeting listservs, at campaign-related events and in casual conversation among concerned parents. I also worry about the very real concerns our fixed income residents share about the tax implications of the DE, and the barrier those concerns may create for a successful vote. I hope, and am willing to work to ensure, that efforts to educate the community on the critical nature of our current and future space needs will be effective and successful. I would encourage voters to be mindful that the plan being put before the town extends beyond the efforts of the school committee and is the product of hundreds of hours of consultant time and time invested on the part of our superintendent(s), principals, Board of Selectman and finance committees. As a member of the School Committee, I would work diligently to ensure full community understanding, and hopefully buy-in, of the plan, distilling it down to its most

critical elements: clear articulation of the plan’s underlying rationale; how it addresses the need; where it falls short; and why and where compromises have been made to address community concerns.

7. *Should we teach foreign languages in elementary school? If so, what trade-offs would you make to bring this about?*

I would like to see Lexington consider broadening our exploration of introducing cross-cultural instruction at the elementary level to be more of a cultural awareness curriculum than a world language curriculum—though language could certainly be a part of what is offered.

Recently, the Harvard School of Education released a report called *Turning the Tide: Inspiring Concern for Others and the Common Good through College Admissions*. Essentially, the report highlights the negative unintended consequences of the college admissions criteria emphasized over the last two decades and encourages admissions officers to look beyond number of AP-level courses and consider *character* when selecting among applicants. Among the recommendations offered is that admissions officers look for applicants who demonstrate: *authentic, meaningful experiences with diversity*. Few communities are as well positioned as Lexington to promote this among our young people and I think a cultural awareness curriculum—one that explores languages, but also traditions, governmental structures, religions, cultural values—would be a greater return on our investment in new programming and, given the rich resources already available to us in town by virtue of our diversity and rich resources already here (CAAL, IAL, KoLex), potentially more affordable. The knowledge is already here...

8. *What, if anything, should be done to improve academic excellence in Lexington?*

Nothing until we come to community agreement about what “academic excellence” means in today’s environment and economy. During the past two decades, our education system has been too focused on preparing students for college—not life. As a consequence, college graduates are less prepared for the challenges of the workplace and independent living. Frankly, I’m less concerned with improving academic excellence than I am with preparing life-long learners who are curious, collaborative, independent, critical thinkers who appreciate the journey of discovery, not the short-term benefit of “getting the A”. To achieve this, I think we need to de-emphasize the role standardized testing—like MCAS—plays in our schools; *particularly at the elementary level*. I also think, as a community, we should be pushing back at the state and federal level around some of the negative implications of the common core standards such as diminished instructional flexibility in the classroom and the space to explore concepts more fully and employ cross-discipline approaches to curriculum design and instruction.

9. *A national discussion is taking place about the intense focus on achievement at some of the elite public schools, and whether it has gone too far. But opinions are divided - some parents see the "increasingly pressured atmosphere as antithetical to learning", while others are concerned "reforms would amount to a "dumbing down" of [their] children’s education". See "New Jersey School District Eases Pressure on Students, Baring an Ethnic Divide", by Kyle Spencer (New York Times, Dec 25, 2015).*

*How do you feel that these concerns apply to Lexington?*

Who among us does their best work when they are: anxious, tired and over-worked? Certainly not me—an adult; and arguably, not children either. I agree with the statement that an “increasingly pressured atmosphere is antithetical to learning.” More importantly, so does research regarding the cognitive development of children’s brains. I encourage everyone who reads this document to also read *Beyond Measure*, the follow up to Vicki Abeles’ *Race to Nowhere*. In the pursuit of “excellence”, students are being asked to spend entirely too much of their day absorbing new information and not enough time sitting with it and allowing deeper connections to be made within their brains. Consequently, retention of what they learn is often short-lived and lacking in deeper understanding.

With respect to Lexington, based on what I’m hearing from my children’s friends at the high school, too many students are spending up to 3-5 hours a night on homework—over and above what is being asked of them during the 7-hour school day. If our children were being asked to do anything else for up to 10-12 hours a day, we would be invoking child labor laws. Yet there are still parents demanding “more”. Why? To what end?

I believe Lexington has become too focused on quantitative measures of our excellence and that we do so at the expense of true learning and balance in our kids’ lives. I desperately want to see reforms in how we schedule our students’ days and approach instruction NOT to “dumb it down”, but to make it meaningful, enduring and prescribed in more manageable doses such that our children have the time and space to pursue non-academic interests, peer relationships and time spent with family in equal measure.

*10. Can you describe one issue which the School Committee handled very effectively over the past year? And one issue that could have been addressed better?*

Ironically, the most effective, collaborative and successful effort of the School Committee over the past year was the hiring process that led to the selection of Dr. Czajkowski. It was a textbook search with consensus attained at every level of the process—selection of a search firm, identification of selection criteria, formation of a committee and, the final selection of a candidate itself.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> part of this question is unfortunately the flip-side of the same coin. The School Committee could have taken a more thoughtful approach to determining how best to transition to new leadership. Given that there was a fairly clear articulation that we were looking for “different” in the selection of a new candidate, there could have been greater understanding that the success of a “different” leader could require a complementary “different” approach by the School Committee. Hopefully as a community we will take away really important and enduring lessons from the bumps we have encountered through this leadership transition. For me these include the importance of up-front conversations about how things get done in Lexington and greater humility and curiosity on our part about how our new Superintendent achieved successful results in her prior districts. This will likely require some pretty meaningful self-awareness as a community and hopefully lead to the creation and documentation of more measured and deliberate transition plans in the future. Just as there is a clear plan for the hiring of new leadership, we should have an equally clear and well-paced plan for their orientation and integration into their role.

*All candidates are asked to limit the response to each question to at most two or three paragraphs, and to provide the questionnaire responses by Sunday, Feb 7th, 2015. Responses will not be edited, and will run as submitted. They will be posted on [lex-wiki.org](http://lex-wiki.org) in PDF format and announced through other town media. Questionnaire reviewer Vicki Blier. Questionnaire coordinator Andrei Radulescu-Banu ([bitdribble@gmail.com](mailto:bitdribble@gmail.com), 617-216-8509).*